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ABSTRACT

Accurate communication of empathy by a counselor may facilitate client self-exploration which, in turn, is necessary for positive outcome. To study the effects of counselor empathic response on client self-exploration, two doctoral level counseling psychology students had one 45-minute interview with each of two college student clients. Counselors switched from a baseline condition of minimum reflection of feeling to an empathetic condition involving high rates of reflection. Raters checked the proper manipulation of empathy from tape recordings and transcripts. Transcripts of the interviews were processed by the Computer Assisted Language Analysis System (CALAS) which classified client language for clauses, verbs, and verb types representing client self-exploration, i.e., expression of experiencing, verbal productivity, and length of utterances. Analysis of results did not support a relationship between counselor empathic responding and client self-exploration. The nonsignificant results may have been related to excessive controls and procedural checks on the dependent and independent variables, or to the fact that whole interviews rather than short segments were analyzed by CALAS. (BH)

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Use of CALAS in a Study of Counselor Empathy
and Client Verbal Behavior

This paper summarizes an experiment in which the effects of counselor empathy on client speech behaviors were investigated using four, initial, counseling analogue interviews. This paper is based upon the author's dissertation research.

The proponents of the client-centered approach to counseling/psychotherapy (Rogers, 1967; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967) believe that accurate communication of empathy by a counselor facilitates client self-exploration which, in turn, is necessary for positive outcome. Based on this theory, high rates of counselor empathic responding were expected to effect increases in client verbal productivity, length of utterances, and expression of experiencing, a construct similar to self-exploration. The dependent variables were operationalized in terms of the theory of case grammar (Cook, 1979).

In this study two doctoral level counseling psychology students each had one 45-minute interview with each of two clients. Counselors switched from a baseline condition involving minimal reflection of feelings to an empathic condition involving high rates of reflection. An ABAB or BABA design was used with 10-minute phases. Tape recordings and transcripts were used by raters to check for proper manipulation of counselor empathy. Transcripts of the interviews were processed by the Computer Assisted Language Analysis System (Rush, Pepinsky, Landry, Meara, Strong, Valley, & Young, 1974),

which classified the language of the client in terms of clauses, verbs, and verb types. These language category frequencies provided the data to operationalize the dependent variables. Chi Square and *t* tests were used to analyze differences in dependent variables between empathic and non-empathic treatment conditions.

Participants who volunteered to be clients in the interviews were recruited from College of Education classes at The University of Tennessee. Two advanced doctoral students in Counseling Psychology who had experience doing counseling were recruited as confederate counselors.

Results of this study did not support a relationship between the independent variable, counselor empathic responding, and the dependent variables: client expression of experiencing, verbal productivity, and length of utterances.

Since previous research has found counselors' probes, minimal encouragers, non-verbal behaviors, self-disclosure, verbal productivity, and duration of utterances to also affect client verbal productivity, length of utterances, and expression of experiencing, controls and procedural checks on these variables were instituted in the present study. It is possible that the increased control may have eliminated the effects of variables which covaried with reflection of feelings in previous studies, thus reducing the effects upon the dependent variables in the present study.

In the present study whole interviews were analyzed as opposed to selected short segments. This was done in view of research by Mintz and Luborsky (1971) and Gurman (1973) which indicated that judgements of therapist empathy based on brief segments could not be generalized to whole sessions. Future studies are needed which explore the possibility that verbal behaviors measured by CALAS also exhibit variability which would prohibit generalization of results from sample segments to larger units.

Cook and Campbell (1979) and Kazdin (1976) have recommended the use of time series statistical analysis in studies of variables across time in order to correct for biases caused by serial dependency in the data. In studies such as the present one in which early and late segments of a counseling interview are compared on some dependent variable, serial dependency could be a problem. To use this type of analysis appropriately, 50 observations in the baseline phase are needed in order to test for serial dependency, to identify a model, and to determine statistical significance of its parameters. This was not possible in the present study due to the small sample size in one 40-minute interview. Serial dependency does not affect measures of central tendency. These values were identical for two hypotheses and extremely similar for the other hypothesis in the present study. Thus, it is unlikely that serial dependency was the cause for nonsignificant results in the present study. Serial dependency does bias tests of significance. If future studies

demonstrate some practical difference between measures of central tendency, and variables are measured across time, time series statistical analysis would be indicated to perform unbiased tests of the significance of these parameters.

In future research, it is recommended that multiple interviews with the same dyad be used. An ABAB design could be used in which each condition would consist of several interviews. This would provide enough data points in each phase for time series statistical analysis and would allow the effect of empathic responding to stablize, thus decreasing variance within conditions and maximizing the opportunity for detecting real differences. It would also be possible with this design to explore the possibility that later counseling sessions would exhibit the hypothesized relationship between these variables, whereas an initial session would not.

Finally, this study demonstrates the heuristic value of the Computer Assisted Language Analysis System. Its capacity for information processing and data reduction of vast amounts of natural language text points the way toward the use of the computer in future research on the highly complex nature of verbal communication in counseling.

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